

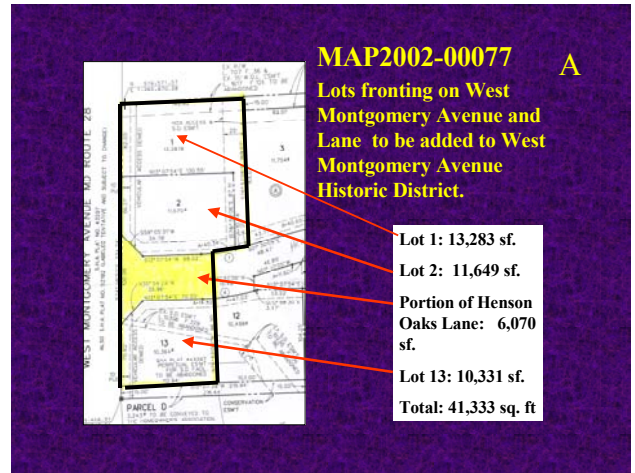
**CITY OF ROCKVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION  
STAFF REPORT**

**December 9, 2003  
MEETING NO. 13-2003**

**APPLICATIONS:** HDC2003-00274 (House C)  
HDC2003-00275 (House A)  
HDC2003-00276 (House B)

**DATE FILED:** November 20, 2003

**APPLICANT** Todd Hickman  
NV Homes  
555 Quince Orchard Rd  
Gaithersburg, MD 20878



**PROPERTY DESCRIPTION**

The subject property is the Thirty Oaks development, formerly known as the Buckingham property, located at 512, 520, and 522 West Montgomery Avenue. The entire project parcel contains 5.35 acres and will have a total of 13 homes, which includes two existing houses that will remain. There will also be a city park of approximately .5 acres associated with the development that will protect many of the existing mature trees of the site.

The subject of this request will be that portion of the Thirty Oaks development that fronts on West Montgomery Avenue, that were incorporated into the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District. The area will include three homes fronting on West Montgomery and the portion of the main subdivision road (Henson Oaks Lane) that intersects West Montgomery Avenue.

**PREVIOUS ACTIONS AT THIS ADDRESS**

PRU2002-00020 Exploratory Plan Application for a Planned Residential Unit (PRU), a special development procedure within an R-S zoning classification. Approved by the Mayor and Council, on October 14, 2002.

PRU2003-0020A Detailed Application for PRU2002-00020, approved by the Planning Commission June 25, 2003.

MAP2002-00077 Map Amendment, approved by the Mayor and Council on November 15, 2003, effectively incorporating a portion of the

	thirty Oaks site into the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District.
DEM2004-00034	Demolish one single family residence and two outbuildings
PLT2003-00404	Thirty Oaks, Lots 1-13, Parcels A-E, Block A
PWK2004-00006	Thirty Oaks Subdivision Public Improvements
PWK2004-00013	Protection of public improvements for demo of existing structure.

## **BACKGROUND**

As part of the approval of PRU2002-00020, the Mayor and Council included within the Resolution of Approval a provision that the three houses that are to face West Montgomery Avenue in this application should be placed in a newly created Historic District, that was to be part of the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District. Through a map amendment approved by the Mayor and Council, a portion of the Thirty Oaks site adjacent to West Montgomery Avenue was incorporated into the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District.

As part of the inclusion into the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District, the Mayor and Council mandated that the HDC would review and approve the designs of the three houses on West Montgomery Avenue. The balance of the houses on the site, which are not part of a historic district, are to be reviewed by the HDC, with comments and suggestions forwarded to the Planning Commission for consideration during their final decision on the balance of the units within the subdivision. That request is not part of this application, and will be submitted to the HDC at a future date.

The lot coverage, building envelopes of the houses, and other site details were established by Exhibits A, B, and C of the Resolution of Approval and cannot be altered by the HDC. Included are allowable square footage per lot, the established setbacks, and driveway locations, landscape plan, buffers, and other information. The HDC has full approval authority regarding materials, style, scale massing and other items typically found in an HDC review and approval.

## **REQUEST**

The applicant has requested Certificates of Approval for three new houses on West Montgomery Avenue within the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District.

## STAFF COMMENTS

### 1. Historic, archeological, or architectural value and significance of the site or structure and its relationship to the historic, archeological, or architectural significance of the surrounding area.

The City of Rockville has retrofitted West Montgomery Avenue with underground utilities, “Victorian” streetlights, and brick walkways to be compatible with the late 19th and early 20th century character of the historic district and the houses along this main street. Although the area in question is not in the center of the district, the streetscape is seen as one of the strongest features of the district. The three subject lots were added to the West Montgomery Historic District in 2003. Compatibility of the new construction with the surrounding neighborhood’s massing, scale, and overall architectural character and the rest of the district are evaluated as part of the HDC’s review.

To the east of the property is the Chestnut Lodge/Washington Waldorf School property, with its 19<sup>th</sup> century Second Empire main building facing towards West Montgomery. Across the street are homes consistent with 20<sup>th</sup> Century development of the western end of West Montgomery Avenue. These range in date of construction from the 1920s through the 1990s and are not within the West Montgomery Historic District. To the west of the property is the Roxboro community, comprised of modest one-story dwellings. These are also outside the historic district.



*Top and center: Houses across W. Montgomery Avenue. Bottom: Houses to the east (Roxboro)*

### 2. The relationship of the exterior architectural features of the structure to the remainder of the entire structure and to the surrounding area.

The three designs proposed by NV Homes are typical of houses designed to sell in 2003 in the \$750,000 to \$1,000,000 range and are much larger than most houses of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20th Century existing historic district houses. They face directly onto West Montgomery Avenue with side exposure for the two houses that flank the entrance road to the development (Houses B and C). As stated before, the Mayor and Council, as part of the

PRU development approval, have established the lot size, maximum allowable building envelopes and ingress/egress via driveways for the homes at Thirty Oaks.

**3. The general compatibility of exterior design, scale, proportion, arrangement, texture, and materials proposed to be used.**

The HDC's *Adopted Architectural Guidelines* state that "the focus of the guidelines is on the compatibility of new construction with the existing character of the district in question, without dictating style or taste." The *Guidelines for Historic Property Owners – New Construction* expands on this idea, stating that new buildings "should be compatible with the district's setback, massing, scale, materials, and details. Roof lines, fenestration, and other exterior features should be consistent with existing original design [of buildings in the district]."

For each proposed new house, the **setback** is determined by the PRU Resolution of Approval, Exhibit B. Generally, the houses will maintain a 30-foot setback from West Montgomery and 11 feet on the sides. The two houses flanking the entrance road will have 20-foot setbacks from the Henson Oaks Lane frontage, and generally, 25-foot rear setbacks. In terms of **massing**, the applicant has attempted to break up the large houses by varying the roof forms, using a different roof height for the garages, and setting back the garages away from the plane of the façade. The **scale** of these houses is not dissimilar to some structures further east in the historic district. Houses of the 1880s and 1890s were typically quite large, although often with a deeper setback. Because of plantings and sidewalks, however, the scale of the proposed houses will not be incompatible with the West Montgomery Avenue streetscape.

For exterior **materials**, the applicant has selected primarily synthetic finishes. The material specifications are included with each application. The applicant proposes to use 7" exposure Hardiplank siding for Houses A and C and tan brick veneer for House B, vinyl 2/2 double hung windows, fiberglass doors with an oval light, synboard trim work, vinyl-wrapped railings. The main roofs will be asphalt shingle and the porches will have black standing-seam metal roofs.

In general, staff finds that the applied architectural **details** are overdone and create a "busy" or "cluttered" aesthetic. Although these houses compare in mass to some others within the historic district, the original resources have deeper setbacks and employ the Victorian tradition of a gradual visual and massing transition. Such a transition flows from street to walkway to yard to front yard plantings to a one story front porch with stairs, balustrade, formal and front entry detail, to a lesser amount of second story detail and a broader roof detail. Differentiation among homes in the historic district tends to rely on the varied massing and façade articulation as much as embellishment. Each was a custom built design and fairly unique. When related houses of this mass and size are built with smaller side and front setbacks without transitional areas, and lack large areas of separation from each other, the amount of detail concentrated in such a closely spaced group can overpower the streetscape.

Simpler details are more commonly found on houses in the historic district, especially towards the western end of West Montgomery Avenue. The exceptions, such as 117 West Montgomery Avenue, are exceptional examples. The gingerbread approach to ornamenting these houses, in staff's opinion, make them stand out rather than blend in with the architectural character of the district and the surrounding streetscape.

**4. To any other factors, including aesthetic factors, which the Commission deems to be pertinent.**

N/A

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends the approval of HDC2003-00274, HDC2003-00275, and HDC2003-00276 to construct three new houses in the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District with conditions to be determined by the HDC, assisted by the following recommendations:

**For all three houses:**

- A symmetrical gable roof would be more appropriate for the garage roofs. A dormer facing the rear could recapture some of the space lost with the more steeply pitched roof.
- Consider 2-bay garage with separate doors or with simulated separation in the design of the large single door. Windows in the garage doors would help break up the expanse of the door.
- Use a different front door for each house. The repetition of the oval pane door does not reflect the varied periods and styles of the district. Solid paneled doors or doors with paneling and small upper glazing are appropriate alternatives.
- The window size should be consistent on all facades (except garages – see below). Either continue the use of transoms over the main façade windows or eliminate them from the sides and rear windows (they are appropriate over doors).
- Make the windows for the garages smaller than the windows for the main house to give less significance to this part of the house and make the garages seem more like additions rather than part of the original design. 4/4 or smaller 2/2 windows are appropriate.
- The small square window on the side elevation (bathroom) should have four panes, not two.
- Each house has an incompatible second floor window on the side of house with garage, which appear to be 2-pane sliders. This window should be a 2/2 double hung sash to match the others on the house. Each house also has an incompatible bank of three windows on the rear (kitchen) beside the back door. While these are on the rear of the house, consider making them consistent with the oblong or square 2/2 vocabulary used for the remainder of the house.

- The porch banister should overhang the railing to give a more finished look to the design.
- The roof shingles should be rectangular cut; a dark color is preferable.

**House A:**

- Smooth grained Hardiplank is recommended. Wood grained siding creates a weathered look inappropriate for new construction.
- For the balcony over the front porch, consider replicating the railing design of the porch and using simple square posts at the corners rather than a Hardiplank-wrapped knee wall and pillars. Eliminate the globes on top of the corner posts.
- Two windows on garage, maybe paired, in addition to reducing their size, will help de-emphasize the presence of an attached garage.
- The dormers can be much simpler, both the trim work and glazing, which could be square or rectangular 4-pane or 2/2 windows rather than an arch-top 2/2 windows (as in the main dormers on House B)
- For the central window feature on the main façade, a true Palladian window with rectangular flanking windows is greatly preferred over the arch-top flanking windows. A fanlight in the central section would be aesthetically appropriate.
- Consider a slightly smaller, undecorated frieze board to differentiate from House C.

**House B:**

- Shutters should be “sash length and half the width” in order to appear as functioning features of the house rather than applied ornament (per Architectural Guidelines).
- For this house, in particular, consider a door other than oval pane.

**House C:**

- Smooth grained Hardiplank is recommended. Wood grained siding creates a weathered look inappropriate for new construction.
- The dormers can be much simpler in both the trim work and glazing, which could be square or rectangular 4-pane or 2/2 windows rather than an arch-top 2/2 windows (as in the main dormers on House B)



**MAP2002-00077**

**A**

**Lots fronting on West Montgomery Avenue and Lane to be added to West Montgomery Avenue Historic District.**

**Lot 1: 13,283 sf.**

**Lot 2: 11,649 sf.**

**Portion of Henson Oaks Lane: 6,070 sf.**

**Lot 13: 10,331 sf.**

**Total: 41,333 sq. ft**

# A

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**Lot 2: 11,649 sf.**

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Oaks Lane: 6,070  
sf.**

**Lot 13: 10,331 sf.**

**Total: 41,333 sq. ft**

APPROVED SUBDIVISION PLAN FOR THIRTY OAKS

